

California Estuary Monitoring Workgroup CHARTER September 7, 2023

Mission

The mission of the California Estuary Monitoring Workgroup (CEMW) is to advance the science and practice of estuary monitoring and assessment in California and to improve coordination and information sharing among regional efforts, with local community and tribal nations/indigenous groups, and with the public.

The mission will be accomplished by providing a forum for coordination and technical exchanges among government agencies, research and academic institutions, tribes, and non-governmental organizations in California focused on understanding the extent, health and effect of stressors on California's estuaries. The workgroup will strive to improve agency and public access to physical, chemical and ecological data, information and tools related to estuarine assessments, and to provide a common vision for use of tools and science-based information to support sound decision making.

Background and Definitions

Monitoring and assessment tools can encompass all levels of the USEPA Level 1-2-3 framework (<https://www.epa.gov/wetlands/wetlands-monitoring-and-assessment>) and can include assessment of extent, condition, function, stress, and values/services.

- Level 1, "landscape assessment" relies on coarse, landscape scale inventory information, typically gathered through remote sensing and preferably stored in, or convertible to, a geographic information system (GIS) format. Classification of wetlands is also done at this level.
- Level 2 is "rapid" condition assessment at the specific wetland site scale, using relatively simple, rapid protocols. Level 2 assessment protocols are to be validated by and calibrated to Level 3 assessments.
- Level 3 is "intensive site assessment" and uses intensive research-derived, multi-metric indices. They are meant to give detailed information regarding how well a wetland is functioning and are typically used as surrogates for processes (or rates) that occur over time (e.g., nutrient cycling, energy dissipation).

In addition to functions, estuaries also provide services, which are generally defined as the benefits to humans provided by functions and features of healthy ecosystems.

Need for the Workgroup

Multiple statewide and regional efforts have been developed or are planned to assess function or condition of estuaries to inform funding or management, or to assess the efficacy of past investments and actions. The workgroup is aimed at providing a forum for communication and coordination of these efforts in order to leverage resources and efforts, share tools and approaches, increase standardization, improve data sharing and access and identify common needs. Moreover, there are multiple programs aimed at developing goals and strategies for

estuary protection, restoration, and management. This workgroup can serve as forum for interactions and collaboration across these programs.

Scope and Objectives

The main objective of the Workgroup is to advance the science and management of estuary monitoring and assessment. This objective will be met by the following actions:

- Facilitate coordination between various agencies and programs involved with estuary assessment efforts and with other monitoring workgroups of the Water Quality Monitoring Council (e.g., CWMW, HWP);
- Provide recommendations for comparable, scientifically defensible, well documented, and coordinated methods for assessing estuaries to inform restoration, management, and climate adaptation actions;
- Identify mechanisms to make information on tools, current and legacy data, case studies, and lessons learned from past estuary monitoring and assessment efforts more readily accessible and understandable to the public. This could include creating a new web portal or partnering/linking with existing portals or clearinghouses.;
- Establish best practices for data collection, management, and distribution of information to improve our statewide understanding of estuary condition, stress, and vulnerability. These best practices should be coordinated with regulatory programs to support permit streamlining and efficiency of project review;
- Provide a forum for collaboration around development of state and regional action plans and strategy documents aimed at improving the protection, restoration, and management of estuaries;
- Identify opportunities for partnership and resource leveraging on restoration projects that can support both regulatory and non-regulatory needs for estuary restoration and management.
- Serve as a mechanism for consistent identification of potential reference or sentinel sites to support state, regional, and local monitoring efforts.
- Develop processes to better integrate ambient and project monitoring
- Incorporate and operationalize justice, equity, diversity and inclusivity principles throughout all Estuary Monitoring Workgroup activities.

Membership and Representation

Representatives from state, regional, tribal and federal agencies, NGOs, academic institutions, and other public or non-profit organizations with authority or responsibility to evaluate/assess estuary condition, function, or services or to manage estuaries, or to develop the science necessary for estuary assessment and management may participate in the Workgroup.

The Workgroup aims to engage tribes, organizations from disadvantaged communities, and other underrepresented groups to share information and better understand their needs for

estuary assessment. The Workgroup also supports the justice, equity, diversity and inclusion goals of the Monitoring Council by promoting an inclusive environment that welcomes open communication and sharing of diverse perspectives.

The Workgroup, at its discretion, may form standing or ad hoc committees to focus on specific technical or programmatic areas. These committees will provide a mechanism for more detailed and intensive participation and discussion. Each committee shall select a chair who will serve as a liaison and report to the Workgroup. Individuals/ with relevant expertise may serve on the committees, regardless of whether they are Workgroup members.

Meeting Frequency and Governance

The Workgroup is based on a spirit of collaboration, open exchange of ideas, and respectful dialogue. Members should come to the groups with this philosophy and the intent to advance the science and application of estuary assessment throughout the state.

Meetings will be open, informal and consensus driven. The Workgroup will be led by a chair and a co-chair, who will be responsible for setting meeting agendas, facilitating discussions during the meeting, tracking action items, and distributing meeting notes. Water Quality Monitoring Council staff may assist in these activities. The chair and co-chairs will be selected annually through majority vote of the Workgroup members. As a matter of practice, the current co-chair should move up to the chair position and a new co-chair should be elected; however, this may change at the discretion of the Workgroup members.

The Workgroup will generally meet quarterly but may elect to change the frequency at its discretion.

How to Become a Group Member:

Individuals wishing to join the workgroup should contact the chair (or co-chair) and request to be added to the group. Membership will generally be open to any individual representing an appropriate organization. Upon joining the group, new members will be asked to provide a brief summary of their background and current responsibilities as it relates to estuary assessment. Members may be asked to leave the group if they don't meet the basic criteria or embody the spirit of collaboration and progress.